

Message Text

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17

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01 ACDA-05

AID-05 TRSE-00 DHA-02 /101 W
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R 251533Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5188

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION USUN NY

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

FOSIF ROTA

COMSIXTHFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0445

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR PFOR MR MO AG SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: COMMENTS BY MAURITANIAN DEFENSE MINISTER

SUMMARY: MAURITANIAN DEFENSE MINISTER, IN FRANK DISCUSSION
WITH MISSION OFFICER, COMMENTED THAT MAURITANIAN-OCCUPIED POR-
TION OF SAHARA IS CURRENTLY CALM ALTHOUGH NUMEROUS PROBLEMS
REMAIN ON HORIZON. HE WARNED SPECIFICALLY THAT ALGERIA MAY BE
MORE INTERESTED IN CAUSING HARDSHIP FOR MAURITANIA THAN FOR
MOROCCO. HE SAID KING HASSAN GAVE ASSURENCES THAT IF MOROCCAN
PRESENCE IN DAKHLA CAUSES PROBLEMS FOR GIRM, THEN KING WILL
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ASK ALL MOROCCANS TO LEAVE CITY. END SUMMARY.

1. AT CONCLUSION OF DISCUSSION ON GIRM REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE WITH AID FOOD FOR PEACE OFFICER, MAURITANIAN DROUGHT RELIEF COORDINATOR AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE, DR. ABDALLAHI OULD BAH, VOLUNTEERED NUMBER OF COMMENTS ON SAHARA SITUATION. HE BEGAN RELAXED MONOLOGUE BY NOTING THAT GIRM IS FINANCIALLY STRAPPED AS RESULT OF UNANTICIPATED EXPENDITURES RESULTING FROM SAHARA CAMPAIGN. BAH SAID THAT WHILE SITUATION IS PRESENTLY CALM AND HE HOPED IT WOULD REMAIN SO, THERE ARE STILL MANY POTENTIAL PROBLEMS. FEBRUARY 28 WITHDRAWAL OF SPANISH MIGHT WELL SERVE AS BASIS FOR FURTHER ACTION BY POLISARIO AND ALGERIANS. BAH EMPHASIZED THAT WHEREAS MOROCCO MIGHT HAVE BEEN MAJOR TARGET INITIALLY OF POLISARIO AND ALGERIANS, THIS MAY NO LONGER BE CASE. HE SAID ALGERIANS, BELIEVING MAURITANIA TO BE PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY AS COMPARED TO REACTIONARY MOROCCO, CONSIDER GIRM ROLE IN SAHARA AS PARTICULARLY TRAITOROUS. BAH STATED KING HASSAN HAD TOLD HIM PERSONALLY THAT HE (HASSAN) HAD BEEN TOLD BY BOUMEDIENE THAT MAURITANIA "REGLERA LA FACTURE" (WILL PAY THE PRICE).

2. BAH POINTED OUT THAT ALGERIANS ARE ALLEGEDLY UPSET BY SUPERIOR ABILITY OF MAURITANIANS IN DESERT WARFARE AS COMPARED TO MODERNIZED AND MECHANIZED MOROCCAN FORCES. HE ADDED THAT MAURITANIANS, WHO ARE USED TO DESERT AND HARDSHIP, HAD BEEN ABLE TO MATCH POLISARIO AND ALGERIANS IN COMBAT. BAH CLAIMED THAT RECENT IMPROVEMENT OF SITUATION NEAR BIR MOGHREIN RESULTED FROM ALGERIAN NECESSITY TO MOVE ARTILLERY TO AMGALLA FOR ALGERIAN REVENGE ATTACK ON MOROCCANS. BAH COMMENTED THAT IN FIRST AMBALLA CLASH ALGERIAN COLUMN HAD IN FACT BEEN HEADING FOR MAURITANIA-OCCUPIED PORTION OF SAHARA.

3. DEFENSE MINISTER CLAIMED THAT THREE-QUARTERS OF POLISARIO IS COMPOSED OF MAURITANIAN DISSIDENTS, WHOSE LOYALTY IS MORE TO TRIBES THAN TO ANY NATION. CONSEQUENTLY, CLASHES IN SAHARA BETWEEN POLISARIO AND GIRM FORCES ARE FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES
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CLASHES BETWEEN MAURITANIANS. HE NOTED THAT CAPTURED POLISARIO PRISONERS INCLUDE PERSONS FROM VIRTUALLY EVERY REGION IN MAURITANIA. BAH ADDED THAT GIRM HAS ADOPTED POLICY OF TAKING NO ACTION AGAINST ADMITTED POLISARIO MEMBERS UNLESS THEY ARE CAPTURED IN ACTUAL COMBAT.

4. BAH VOLUNTEERED PERSONAL VIEW THAT MAURITANIA IS

MORE CLOSELY RELATED TO ALGERIA THAN TO MOROCCO, BUT ADDED PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH HAS GIVEN HIS WORD TO MOROCCO ON THE SAHARA AND HE WOULD NOT GO BACK ON IT. BAH EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT ATTITUDE OF ALGERIANS SINCE THEY HAD EARLIER SAID SAHARA IS NOT THEIR AFFAIR AND SHOULD BE HANDLED BY MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA. WHEN ASKED IF JOINT ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE ESTABLISHED IN SAHARA AFTER DEPARTURE OF SPANISH, MINISTER REPLIED "CERTAINLY NOT". ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT POSITIVE ABOUT OPERATION OF PHOSPHATE MINES, WHICH HE THOUGHT MIGHT BE JOINTLY EXPLOITED, ADMINISTRATION OF SAHARA WOULD REMAIN SEPARATE. ALL PORTIONS OF THE SAHARA WILL BE OCCUPIED BY EITHER MAURITANIA OR MOROCCO, BUT NOT JOINTLY. HE NOTED THAT PAST DIFFICULTIES THERE HAD BEEN AT LOCAL RATHER THAN NATIONAL LEVEL. MINISTER SAID KING HASSAN ASSURED HIM THAT MOROCCANS WOULD PULL OUT OF DAKHLA WHENEVER GIRM SO REQUESTED. HANDY SIDE

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